Having described the invention, what is claimed is:

1. A thrust bearing assembly comprising:

two thrust races;

a plurality of rolling elements between and against the two thrust races, for supporting relative rotation of the thrust races about a common axis;

a spring washer axially outward of the two thrust races for engaging a support surface and for applying a preload to a first of the two thrust races; and

retention means for retaining the two thrust races, the rolling elements and the spring washer together as an assembly to facilitate handling and installation.

2. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein the retention means comprises an axially extending case positioned radially inward or radially outward of the two thrust races, the rolling elements and the spring washer, to restrain radial movement thereof; and wherein the case has radially extending portions engageable with the spring washer and a second of the two thrust races to restrain axially outward movement of the spring washer and the second thrust race.

3. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 2, wherein the case comprises a drawn cup with a lip extending radially and engageable with the spring washer to restrain axially outward movement of the spring washer.

4. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 3, wherein the case includes a second lip extending radially and engageable with the second thrust race.

5. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein the case is formed of two drawn cups that overlap, forming a cylindrical double-wall portion.

6. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein the case is formed of a single drawn cup.

7. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein the case comprises a drawn cup with an apertured bottom portion extending radially and engageable with the spring washer to restrain axially outward movement of the spring washer.

8. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein the spring washer comprises a Belleville spring having a

conical cup facing axially outward from the thrust races.

9. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein the spring washer comprises a Belleville spring having a conical cup facing axially inward toward the thrust races.

10. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein a first of the thrust races has an outer diameter smaller than the outer diameter of a second of the thrust races, to facilitate flow of lubricant, and wherein the first thrust race has an inner diameter smaller than the inner diameter of the second thrust race, to facilitate flow of lubricant.

11. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein the rolling elements are rollers retained within a bearing cage.

12. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 11, wherein the bearing cage is of a box-type configuration.

13. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 11, wherein the bearing cage is of a sigma-type configuration.

14. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 2, wherein at least some of the radially extending portions engageable with the spring washer or thrust race are formed by staking.

15. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein the two thrust races, the rolling elements and the spring washer are configured to have zero axial clearance within the retention means, prior to installation of the thrust bearing assembly, such that damage from vibration during handling is reduced.